

December 28, 2005: SAVING D.C. GUN SAFETY LAWS & GAINING MID-YEAR BUDGET AUTONOMY...

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SAVING D.C. GUN SAFETY LAWS & GAINING MID-YEAR BUDGET AUTONOMY
TOP NORTON'S 2005 VICTORIES
D.C. LAND TRANSFER & FULL BUDGET AUTONOMY MAJOR 2006 GOALS

Washington, D.C. - The Office of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today released the Congresswoman's accomplishments for the first session of the 109th Congress, which ended this year, and her major goals for 2006, the upcoming second session of the 109th Congress. Topping the list of Norton victories in 2005 were several hard fought bills, none sweeter or more critical than Norton's success in blocking the fourth attempt to repeal D.C.'s gun safety laws. However, passage of Norton's Mid-year Budget Autonomy Bill freeing D.C. from the federal supplemental appropriations process is the most important structural change since the passage of the Home Rule Act. For the first time beginning in 2006, the District will be able to spend its own funds without congressional approval all year until the next appropriations cycle. Other achievements of special importance this year were: getting Reagan National Airport opened to general aviation (charter and small planes) as mandated by an earlier Norton bill; getting D.C. one of the nation's largest reauthorized amounts in the transportation bill and the first federal racial profiling provision included in the bill; leadership in restoring \$50 million in mass transportation appropriations; passage of Norton's bill naming the D.C. Federal Court annex for pioneering African American Federal Judge William B. Bryant; winning approval of two rail security amendments; and securing adoption of an equal D.C. congressional voting rights provision by an international assembly to which the United States belongs.

Norton's top goals for 2006 include important bills on which she already has made strong headway--extension of the D.C.-only \$5,000 homebuyer and business tax credits, already passed by the House and Senate and likely to pass in conference; passage of the Budget Autonomy bill, which Norton got through the Senate in the 108th Congress, a section of which has now cleared the House for D.C. supplemental appropriations; the D.C. Real Property land transfer bill, which is close to passage in the House; the D.C. Fair Federal Compensation Act, on which Norton has already secured a promise of a hearing in 2006; passage of important provisions from her comprehensive Anacostia River clean-up bill; and passage of Norton's Safe TRAINS Act, with two provisions already through the House, to assure the safety of Metro, Union Station, and rail and mass transit nationally.

2005 Victories

Stopped Gun Law Repeal—Again

The NRA tried and failed for the fourth time to repeal D.C.'s gun safety laws. This time Norton had to beat back not one but two different measures that threatened to bring more guns to D.C. streets: a bill for total repeal of D.C.'s handgun laws that she worked successfully to block on the House floor; and a weaker rider provision to allow shotguns and rifles that the House passed but Norton worked to stop in the Senate and knocked out in the final conference bill.

D.C. Mid-year Budget Autonomy Bill a Major Home Rule Gain

The Norton Semi-annual D.C. Budget Autonomy bill was passed as part of the D.C. Omnibus Authorization Act of 2005 and is likely to pass in the Senate early next year. The first budget freedom from any part of the congressional appropriations process, this bill enacts an important section of the D.C. Budget Autonomy Act. Passage of this mid-year provision gives the full budget autonomy bill, sponsored by Norton and Rep. Tom Davis (R-VA), a head-start on passage in 2006 to achieve the same freedom from the annual congressional appropriations process that redundantly requires the District's balanced budget to be enacted by Congress before it becomes effective.

Norton believes she is close to passage of the full Act, considering her success in getting D.C.'s local budget for the coming year automatically released on time for the third year in a row, even though the federal budget has repeatedly been held up for months. This change has disentangled the local D.C. budget from the federal budget and has allowed the city to fully operate on its local budget at the increased levels passed by the Council rather than on a prior year's continuing resolution, and therefore to meet increased expenditures, operate new programs and keep city agencies running smoothly.

Renewed Tax Credits for D.C. Homebuyers and Businesses

Norton was able to keep her D.C.-only \$5,000 homebuyer and business tax incentives from expiring by successfully keeping them in a national package of tax cuts passed by both Houses. The credits are now awaiting conference

passage and are likely to be retroactive. These tax incentives are credited with stabilizing the city's population by stemming the near-catastrophic taxpayer flight of recent decades and by bringing and keeping businesses in the city, where the cost of doing business often is otherwise significantly higher than in the suburbs. Thousands of residents and jobs have resulted, as the credits became a magnet for renters to buy here and others to move to D.C. instead of the suburbs and for businesses to remain and come to D.C., using the D.C. tax incentives unavailable elsewhere. One of the most important incentives in the bill is a significant credit for every D.C. resident employed or hired.

D.C.'s Reserve Funds Freed

For the first time since the Control Board period, a Norton provision passed the House allowing the District to tap its emergency and contingency reserve funds, provided they are reimbursed. Norton's success followed repeated attempts to get Congress to relax this uniquely strict limitation that kept large amounts accumulating and untouchable, while immediate, vital needs, such as dilapidated schools, angered residents.

40% Increase in Transportation Funds

Norton worked hard against threats to D.C.'s per capita funding in the reauthorized Transportation bill (SAFETEA-LU) bill and maintained the city's top amount in the country. Despite many cuts in the long awaited bill, D.C. received a 40% increase over the last reauthorization and Norton also was able to secure millions of dollars for extra projects, as a senior member of the Transportation Committee. Particularly noteworthy is her achievement of the first racial profiling provision in federal law, with funding to encourage states and localities to enact and enforce their own racial profiling laws. Among the projects that will benefit from the extra TEA-LU funds are the South Capitol Street and 11th Street bridges, the Metro Branch Trail and other critical infrastructure.

Norton Bill Gets Reagan National Fully Open

The top Transportation Security Administration official called Norton this spring with word that general aviation (charter and small plane service) would be resumed at National, implementing her bill for full reopening as passed two years ago in the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization. Norton recruited the leadership of the Transportation Committee to continue the fight when the Bush administration initially ignored her amendment. As the only regional member on the Aviation Subcommittee, Norton had tried since shortly after 9/11 to fully open general aviation, concerned that Reagan, despite unique safeguards, was the only airport in the country where full service had not been restored.

House Moves Anacostia River Amendments

An important section of Norton's comprehensive bill to clean up the Anacostia River was passed by the House in the Water Resources Development Act. The Norton amendment requires the Army Corps of Engineers to coordinate regional development of a 10-year comprehensive action plan for restoration of the Anacostia and its tributaries. Norton seized the opportunity to press forward this section of the first comprehensive Anacostia bill in the Water Resources Committee, on which she serves. She believes that a federal statutory coordinator is necessary to get Maryland, Virginia and the District to move together on a single plan and on local funding, the predicate for the \$250 million authorization in her bill. Combined sewer overflow remediation is a major part of the bill and a major cause of Anacostia pollution.

D.C. Benefits from Appropriations Committee Changes

Norton successfully fought for the best deal for D.C. in 2005, when the House Appropriations Committee eliminated three subcommittees, including the separate D.C. appropriations subcommittee. She succeeded in getting D.C. included with the subcommittee most favorable to the District, the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, HUD, the Judiciary, District of Columbia, and Independent Agencies. As part of this large subcommittee, D.C. receives far less oversight than in the old House D.C. appropriations subcommittee, which had a long history of home rule interference. Norton worked successfully with Senate Chairman Thad Cochran (MS), however, to retain the Senate D.C. appropriations subcommittee because of its tradition of helping to achieve important pro-home rule breakthroughs, such as the Budget Autonomy bill, which passed the Senate in December of 2003.

Congress Enacts Norton Bill Naming Federal Courthouse Annex for Judge Bryant

After more than two years of repeated efforts, Norton was successful in naming the new federal courthouse annex at 3rd and Constitution Avenue, NW for Federal District Court Judge William B. Bryant, a graduate of the D.C. public schools and the first African American to serve as Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court, and the first Black Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia. Bryant won important federal and Supreme Court cases as a distinguished lawyer when the D.C. Bar Association did not admit blacks. Norton worked with colleagues in the Senate to break a logjam and add the Bryant naming bill as an amendment to a bill naming a federal building in Detroit for Rosa Parks.

Extra Appropriations for D.C.

Despite the tense atmosphere and divisions in Congress on controversial budget cuts and tax cut measures, Norton has been able to work with appropriators to obtain extra funding for D.C. projects and organizations. Among the most important are \$650,000 for the Whitman-Walker Clinic, which serves people with HIV and AIDS, at a time when the agency is still recovering from a funding crisis; a \$123 million authorization for restoration of the Frederick Douglass Bridge and the South Capitol Street corridor; and \$1 million for Washington Hospital Center's Bioterrorism Preparedness Program, a project Norton began working on after 9-11, with continuing appropriations each year. Other Norton appropriation wins included critical continuing funding for Norton's college tuition assistance grants (TAG), annual police reimbursement for national demonstrations, funds for a bioterrorism and forensics lab, and sewer overflow funding to repair and upgrade the District's antiquated combined sewer system.

Secure TRAINS Amendments Move

Spurred by concern for Metro, rail, and Union Station security and the refusal of the federal government to reroute toxic cargo freight, Norton has become the Congressional leader on public transportation security and the lead sponsor of the Secure TRAINS Act. She got two important amendments from the Act adopted as part of the Homeland Security reauthorization bill. They require the Department of Homeland Security to develop security best practices to be used by mass transportation operators and to develop a national plan for passenger and employee awareness to prevent and respond to terrorist acts on public transportation. Norton believes that the Madrid and London attacks demonstrate that terrorists have moved their focus and understand that public transportation, with 9 billion passenger trips annually, is what the people ride.

Postal Service Action for Workers

When Norton's questions at a Postal Service hearing revealed a lack of ventilation and air conditioning at the huge V Street facility, for fear of spreading anthrax, the Postal Service agreed to hasten the installation of state-of-the-art equipment. Afterwards, Norton inspected the facility, met with union and management employees, and visited with employees.

Voting Rights Progress

International Body Votes for Equal Voting Rights

Determined to make the denial of D.C. voting rights an international issue as D.C. residents serve in time of war, Norton sought and got an appointment to a 12-member U.S. delegation (six Democrats and six Republicans from the House and Senate) to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), a respected international human rights body consisting of West and East European nations and the United States. She then introduced her provision for equal D.C. congressional voting rights and got it passed. The Republican delegates did not oppose her amendment. Norton asked the international delegates from 55 nations to "become messengers to the world," to help remedy the denial of democracy in "the capital of the free world" because most people in other countries, like most Americans, are unaware of this human rights violation.

Three Republicans Join Norton in Voting Rights Plea

Norton and three Republican House members sent a "Dear Colleague" letter reporting the results of a national D.C. Vote survey showing that 82% of Americans support equal voting rights for D.C. residents in the Senate and House — up 10 points in just five years. Besides Norton, the letter was signed by Representatives Tom Davis (VA), Ralph Regula (OH), Dana Rohrabacher (CA), the authors of three separate bills with different approaches to achieving voting rights. The Congresswoman said that the members are working together "to lay the groundwork that is necessary for voting rights to be taken seriously in the Congress."

Meanwhile, apart from her own bill, Norton has continued to work with any member of Congress who supports congressional voting rights in any form. She is working closest with Congressman Tom Davis, because his bill is consistent with hers in giving the District full voting rights, at least in the House. While the Congresswoman supports the Davis bill, there are many unresolved issues remaining for both Republicans and Democrats. Davis has told the press that he is "still a ways," from a mark-up because his staff is still working with the Utah delegation and because he needs to get more Republican support for his bill in the House. Norton also is working to assure that both Democrats and Republicans in Utah support the bill, the predicate to achieving bipartisan support in the House.

Norton-Lieberman Voting Rights Bill Reintroduced in House and Senate

As Iraqis voted for the first time in historic elections, Norton and Senator Joe Lieberman appeared together at a news conference to reintroduce the "No Taxation without Representation Act," the only D.C. voting rights bill introduced in both the Senate and the House. Appearing with them was an Iraqi-born American and a D.C. veteran of the Iraq War, who asked for the same voting rights for D.C. residents as for Iraqi citizens. Norton also used the occasion of the first Iraq elections to stand with three D.C. residents who served in Iraq, as they asked the Speaker to return D.C.'s vote in

the Committee of the Whole on the House floor. Norton won the vote that allowed D.C. a vote on almost all House floor business more than 10 years ago, but it was taken back by Republicans when they took control of the House. Norton said that the incremental step D.C. is likely to attain is this first-ever vote on the House floor because it can be returned by House rules.

Rosa Parks Honors

After working with other members of the Congressional Black Caucus to give civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks the honor of being the first woman to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda, Norton presided at the Memorial Service for Ms. Parks at the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church. In her nationally-televised remarks, the Congresswoman spoke of Ms. Parks's gift of non-violent protest, especially to "the residents of the District of Columbia, who still feed from her inspiration to achieve equality with other Americans, including equal voting rights in the Congress."

Residents Respond at Town Meetings on the Year's Critical Issues

War and Budget Cuts for Residents Without a Vote

Speak Out Turnout

Norton, who was particularly distressed that the repeated pleas of the U.N. inspectors in Iraq for more time to find weapons of mass destruction were ignored, continued her opposition to the war after the invasion. She believed that honored Vietnam War veteran, Rep. Jack Murtha's (D-PA) call for a gradual withdrawal signaled a turning point and called her constituents to the House for a Speak Out on Iraq, regardless of their views, and on U.S. spending priorities, considering large cuts in programs and continuing tax cuts for the wealthy. WAMU radio commentator Kojo Nnamdi hosted a healthy turnout of residents, and Norton is posting their views on her website and in the Congressional Record.

Guantanamo Follow-up Trip

Norton made a second visit to Guantanamo Bay in 2005, following a trip in 2004 in order to see if conditions had improved. She went to Cuba again because she was concerned about reports of inhumane treatment at Guantanamo that emerged after her first trip. Those reports led her to publish a Washington Post op-ed objecting to "the dog and pony show of benign interrogations" her congressional delegation had been shown while apparently torture was occurring elsewhere at the facility. On her second trip, Norton found improved conditions after being shown every part of the facility, but she nevertheless believes that an independent commission is the only way to remove the taint from the facility and test the new safeguards to assure that that controversial treatment does not recur.

Prescription Drugs and Social Security: Helping Senior through the Benefits & Risks

A new bill benefiting seniors--the prescription drugs bill--and an initiative threatening their benefits--the Bush plan to privatize Social Security--resulted in record turn-outs for three special Norton town meetings this year. Two town meetings on the prescription drug bill helped seniors through the puzzling array of options and traps in the controversial prescription drugs bill. Norton's Social Security Town meeting emphasized that not only seniors but many children and survivors were at risk. Of all Social Security recipients, 30% are children, other family members and survivors, and temporarily and permanently disabled people. Democratic town meetings like Norton's exposed Bush's plan for making Social Security funding issues worse and pushed the plan from the national agenda.

2006 GOALS

Budget Autonomy Closer This Year

Heartened by the achievement of the Mid-Year Budget Autonomy bill, Norton will press the full D.C. Budget Autonomy Act she introduced with Rep. Tom Davis this year. Norton also is optimistic because her full budget autonomy bill passed the Senate in December of 2003. The bill failed in the House because of the objections of some appropriators, but with new appropriators who have already passed semi-annual budget autonomy, she will strongly press for budget autonomy from the annual federal appropriations process. Short of statehood and voting rights, budget autonomy is the most important self-government change Congress could make for the District.

D.C. Federal Contribution Act – Key to Lowering D.C. Taxes and Preventing Fiscal Crisis

Chairman Davis has promised Norton a hearing on the Fair Federal Compensation Act of 2005, co-sponsored by Davis and the entire regional delegation. The bill offsets part, though not all, of the annual structural imbalance by providing for an annual federal contribution of \$800 million that increases with the cost of living. This bill is essential to preventing another D.C. fiscal crisis because the city cannot sustain permanently its pick-up the structural deficit through one of the highest tax rates for businesses and residents in the country, particularly as costs rise and outstrip the city's

capacity to raise revenue. The bill's chances improved significantly when the GAO found that the structural deficit is federal not local, resulting from federal use of the city's most valuable land, D.C.'s continuing responsibility for many costly state functions, the commuter tax ban, and other federally imposed mandates.

Land Transfer Bill Soon to Senate

Congresswoman Norton introduced two land transfer bills, both aimed at using land to obtain partial payment to compensate the District for the structural imbalance from several federally imposed mandates, among them the bar on a commuter tax and the use of the District's prime land without payment. Norton also added an important amendment requiring the District to make maximum use of this rare opportunity not only for economic development and the vital revenue stream it is designed to provide. Her amendment requires the city to fund and use training programs for employment of residents on the project, to use disadvantaged small businesses, and to do outreach for equity minority participation among the sponsors of proposals. The major sites in both bills are Reservation 13 (D.C. General Hospital site) and Poplar Point, where D.C. plans to build a soccer stadium. The D.C. Real Property Act, which Norton and Davis cosponsored, moved forward, cleared almost all of four committees, and is expected to pass early next year.

Lead Free Water Act for D.C. and the Nation

Following her work in the last Congress on lead found in D.C. water, Norton introduced the Lead Free Drinking Water Act to cover D.C. and the entire country and got major Senate sponsors, who also introduced the bill in the Senate. The lead crisis in the nation's capital pointed up many deficiencies in the Safe Drinking Water Act, which has not been significantly revised in 10 years. Because of the special vulnerability of children and pregnant women to lead, Norton will press passage of the bill, or at least some of its provisions, this year. One of the most important requires improved water testing and lead detection in schools and day care centers.

Moving Secure TRAINS

Norton, a member of the Homeland Security Committee and lead sponsor of the Secure TRAINS Act participated in a press conference with Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, as Norton reintroduced the Act and urged enactment during the 109th Congress. The \$3.5 billion bill is a priority of the Democrats in Congress because most Americans ride subways, buses, rail and other mass transportation, but Congress has dedicated only 0.6 of a penny for transit security, compared with \$9.16 per passenger for air travel security. In 2006, Norton will press for the bill's authorization of competitive grants for rail and local mass transit for such basics as decontamination and surveillance equipment.

Publish D.C. Commission on Black Men and Boys Action Plan

The Commission, established by Norton to address unique problems facing black males that have contributed to severe problems in Black family life, will present its Action Plan for implementation by the Mayor and City Council. As a result of the strong community response and the seriousness of family issues in the African American community, the Commission will become permanent to assure ongoing monitoring and implementation of the Action Plan and to continue its investigations.

Norton Leads CBC on Federal Court Nominees

Norton, a constitutional lawyer, leads the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) evaluations of all federal judicial nominees, a critical role during this period when civil rights and other hard won constitutional and legal remedies could be overturned by new Supreme Court nominees. As a result of her work focusing on the views of judges on racial remedies and other important constitutional and legal issues, the CBC strongly opposed the confirmation of both John Roberts and Samuel Alito.

Major Norton Bills to Watch

Win-Win Metro Payment Bill

Congresswoman Norton is an original co-sponsor of a path-breaking bill to provide a dedicated source of revenue for Metro, the only large system that lacks such systemic support. The bill's \$1.5 billion federal incentive is an acknowledgement of considerable federal responsibility for Metro, whose peak ridership is dominated by federal employees and contractors. In return, the bill requires D.C., Maryland, and Virginia each to enact a dedicated revenue stream. The District has the most to gain in relieving costs that contribute to D.C.'s structural deficit and was the first to respond with a bill pending in the Council for one-half of one percent of existing sales tax revenue to be dedicated to Metro.

Norton Bill To Rescue FEMA After Katrina

Norton, ranking member of the subcommittee with jurisdiction over FEMA, is a lead co-sponsor of the bill to remove

FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security, following the Katrina fiasco. She was one of the first Members on the ground with a congressional delegation to New Orleans and Mississippi and has now concluded that Katrina acted as a dress rehearsal for a terrorist attack and, unfortunately, demonstrated that the U.S. cannot respond quickly and adequately to large scale disasters of any kind. Moreover, her work as a member of the Homeland Security Committee, which shares FEMA oversight, revealed that funds had been redirected from FEMA's natural disaster mission to many less risky security matters. Norton continues to strongly support the creation of the Department to bring together anti-terrorism agencies but thinks that the experience from Katrina, Rita and the recent Florida hurricanes strongly argues for making FEMA the independent, agile, special force -type agency capable of hitting the ground running that FEMA was during the Clinton years. The bill has the bipartisan support of the Transportation Committee leadership.

Other Full Citizenship Bills

Norton continues to seek every aspect of full citizenship for D.C. residents, including all the benefits afforded other jurisdictions, through two additional bills. One would give the District the opportunity to design a quarter coin bearing a design symbolic of the District; another would allow two statues of D.C. history makers to be permanently exhibited at the Capitol-- honors afforded every state whose citizens pay federal income taxes. The Norton coin bill has passed three times in the House, but under a new Senate coin rule, two-thirds of the Senate is now required. Norton is hopeful of Senate passage because coin manufacturers have become interested in the bill. The chair of the House Administration Committee has promised Norton a vote on the D.C. statues bill.